

UF seeks older adults for study of whether exercise or health education prevents mobility disability

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ATTENTION EDITOR: Photo available at www.news.health.ufl.edu/media/recentNews.aspx.

For media inquiries call Czerne M. Reid at 352-273-5814 or e-mail czerne@ufl.edu.

GAINESVILLE, Fla. — The University of Florida is seeking older adults between the ages of 70 and 89 to take part in a lifestyle interventions trial to determine whether exercise or health education can prevent or delay major movement disability in older adults. Field sites will be in both Gainesville and Jacksonville.

Little is known about whether specific interventions can help prevent major mobility disability, defined as the inability to walk a quarter of a mile, or four blocks. For older adults, staving off disability could help them maintain their physical independence and enhance the quality of their later years.

The study — the largest randomized controlled trial ever conducted on physical activity in older adults — is funded by the National Institute on Aging. Called the Lifestyle Interventions and Independence for Elders, or LIFE study, it is a phase 3 randomized controlled trial of 1,600 sedentary older adults who are at risk of mobility disability. UF is one of eight institutions around the country at which the trial will be conducted.

The LIFE Study will compare the long-term effectiveness and practicality of two interventions: a physical activity program and a successful aging health education program.

“We want to change how people live,” said principal investigator Marco Pahor, director of UF’s Institute on Aging and chair of aging and geriatric research in the College of Medicine. “Maintaining independence is one of our public health and clinical priorities for older adults, and modifying lifestyle is an important approach to maintaining independence.”

Eligible participants will be randomly assigned to take part in either a structured physical activity program that includes moderate-intensity physical activity such as walking and exercises to improve strength, balance and flexibility, or in a successful aging program that includes health education workshops and supervised stretching. Individuals will be followed for up to approximately four years. The overall trial will run for six years.

In addition to disability prevention, investigators will examine whether physical activity and health education affect cognitive function, cardiovascular and cardiopulmonary events, serious fall injuries and disability in basic activities of life. They will also look at quality-of-life measures such as depression symptoms, sleep quality, stress and satisfaction with life, and assess the cost-effectiveness of these programs for older people.

To enroll or learn more about the LIFE Study, call 352-273-5919 or toll-free 866-386-7730.